

## **North Idaho's Ag Industry**

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The agriculture industry in northern Idaho includes 2,217 farms producing a market value of \$77.9 million in 2007, the most recent year for which data is available, on an average of 220 acres.

The five northern counties produce a small variety of commodities and comprise only 9 percent of the state's farms. The constraining topography in Shoshone County makes it the least-producing agricultural area in the state.

The Panhandle is known for its logging and forestry, but the region also leads the state in nurseries, cut Christmas trees and grass seed production. Wheat is northern Idaho's top yielding commodity, and forage – land used for all hay and haylage, grass silage and greenchop – is the largest growing crop in terms of acres.

The growing demand for lentils and its increasing market value, particularly in Idaho, have provided a boost to Benewah County's lentil yields.

To the far north, Boundary County produces the most nursery stock in Idaho, and its largest farm, Elk Mountain Farms, is the world's largest contiguous hop farm, producing hops for parent company Anheuser-Busch. The farm was first planted in 1987, and only traditional German hops are grown there from root stock that originated in Europe. The farm also produces canola which is primarily exported to Canada. It is situated in Bonners Ferry because of the 16 hours of sunlight it receives in the summer.

Production of hops is labor intensive, and the price shows it. According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, hops averaged \$2.69 a pound in 2012 compared to 20 cents a pound for canola, for example. In 2011, Idaho harvested 2,265 acres of hops valued at \$14.8 million compared to 18,500 acres of canola valued at \$7.8 million.

In addition to forage, Kootenai County is a leading producer for field and grass seed crops with 15,000 acres on 32 farms, harvesting 22 percent of the state's acres. Jacklin Seed Co. is known for its turf grass including Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass and other specialty grasses used around the world on golf courses and sod farms. Benewah County is also a leading producer of field and grass seed with 26 farms harvesting 11,740 acres.

The agriculture industry employs nearly 2,500 people across the Panhandle with a total payroll of \$13.3 million. Nearly 34 percent are employed in Boundary County. The five most northern counties in Idaho comprise 5.4 percent of the state's agricultural employment.

Last year was the first since the beginning of the recession where employment in the industry posted a statewide increase over the previous year, adding 334 jobs. A similar pattern has been occurring in the north.

Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting are the backbone of rural north Idaho.